



# INKFLOWER

SUZY ZAIL

*'A powerful and necessary tale, beautifully told'*

DANIELLE BINKS

TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Michelle Prawer

WALKER BOOKS

# About the Book

INKFLOWER

AUTHOR: SUZY ZAIL

ISBN 9781760653736 PAPERBACK

JULY 2023

Lisa's father has six months to live. And a story to tell about a boy sent to Auschwitz. A boy who lost everything and started again. A story he has kept hidden – until now.

But Lisa doesn't want to hear it, because she has secrets too. No one at school knows she is Jewish or that her dad is sick. Not even her boyfriend. But that's all about to change. And so is she.

With powerful themes and a strong YA lead character, *Inkflower* is an engaging read which also fits perfectly into the Year 9 & 10 History and English syllabi.

**'With *Inkflower*, Zail presents a harrowing examination of humanity, masterfully layered with touch-points of generational trauma, grief, love and family connection. These stories of our world's darkest hours are more important than ever before, and Zail - with her interminable talent and grace - gifts young readers with a reimagined chapter from her family's own epic history. *Inkflower* is a novel to be studied and savoured, a beautiful if bruising tale any reader will be better for having read.'** – Award-winning author, Danielle Binks

## THESE NOTES ARE FOR:

Secondary school, with particular relevance for Years 9 and 10

Ages 14+

## AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM LINKS FOR THIS LEARNING UNIT:

English, Humanities and Social Sciences.

## CROSS CURRICULA PRIORITIES:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues are brought into the discussion around attitudes to race, including racial profiling and its ramifications.

## GENERAL CAPABILITIES:

Students engage in critical and creative thinking, learning to evaluate multiple perspectives and understand key issues specifically around the themes of difference, racism and prejudice. They will develop ethical understanding by exploring the values, rights and responsibilities of all world citizens reflecting on the way this learning shapes the world in which they live. They will consider their role in shaping a future that is tolerant and accepts difference thus fostering the development of personal values and attributes such as resilience, empathy and respect for others and the capacity to act with ethical integrity.

**Intercultural understanding** is enhanced as students explore the way personal identity is shaped both by culture and experience, fear and prejudice and they will understand that exposure to different cultures is enriching for all.

**Personal and social capability** is enriched through learning to work with others on the projects suggested here (design of an exhibition, Night of the Notables etc) enhancing student ability to negotiate, collaborate and co-operate which are essential 21st century skills.

## Endorsements:

'Suzy Zail's remarkable and compelling book is a must read for teenagers. Not only is it a story about history, love and courage, it fits perfectly into the Year 9 & 10 History and English syllabi. Based on a true story, it's a valuable source for secondary students studying the Holocaust, bringing the past alive and creating a connection to the younger generations. Suzy Zail beautifully explores the human experience of survival against all odds.'

– SUE HAMPEL OAM

- Co-president Melbourne Holocaust Museum; Advisory Board Member National Archives Australia; 2021 Chair of the EWG and member of the Australian delegation in the Education working Group to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance

'A compelling family story which deftly moves between the past and present, between the Holocaust in Europe and suburban life in Melbourne. The book will resonate strongly with young readers and is highly suited as a school text.'

– EMERITUS PROFESSOR DR KONRAD KWIET, Resident Historian at the Sydney Jewish Museum

'A powerful Holocaust story of love, loss and hope that will both challenge and inspire.'

– JAYNE JOSEM, CEO, Melbourne Holocaust Museum

# Suzy Zail on *Inkflower*

Hi, thanks for studying *Inkflower* with your class. The novel tells the story of a Holocaust survivor who had buried his story as a way of moving past the horror of his teen years to build a new life in Australia. It's fiction, but it's the truest thing I've ever written.

We find out at the start of the novel that Emil has Motor Neurone Disease and six months to live and has gathered his family to tell them the secret he's been hiding for so long: the story of a small boy who is beaten up at school and forced to wear a yellow star because he's Jewish, a kid who is shaved, tattooed and torn from his mother at the gates of Auschwitz, put to work in a coal mine and forced to hike through ankle deep snow, but saved time and again by the kindness of strangers.

He tells his story in alternating chapters to his 16-year-old daughter, Lisa and her brothers – the Then chapters – on Friday nights. He tells them about the days after liberation, discovering his parents and brother have been killed, escaping Soviet-controlled Czechoslovakia with a new name and birthday, living in a refugee camp and falling in love.

Lisa's story unfolds in the Now chapters. These are set in her 1980's living room – where her father reveals his past – and at her school with her best mates and her boyfriend, none of whom know she is Jewish or that her father is dying. Lisa is a secret-keeper like her father. She doesn't want to be the news story of the week; she likes the story she has. She listens, at first because she is forced to, later because she wants to understand who she is and where she comes from. Most of what her father teaches her – lessons about life, love and dying – are taught via his Lightwriter's mechanical voice after he loses the power of speech, but it is these lessons about pride, dignity, hope and love that teach her how to be vulnerable and let people in.

Like Lisa's dad, my father was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease and given six months to live. Like Lisa's dad, mine sat us down and told us his story, a story I've stayed true to, except to add some dialogue and detail gleaned from research and a recently unearthed testimony my father gave to the Melbourne Holocaust Museum decades ago.

Everything that happened to Lisa's father mirrors events in my father's life. The challenge was revisiting the feelings my dad's death stirred in me twenty years ago. My father had raised me to build walls and let go of pain and sadness, just like he had after the war. So that's what I did after he died, I thought of him, free of his disease and at peace, and I smiled.

This book was my chance to dig deeper and truly grieve. To be the same age my father was in the camps. To be a Jew in hiding, a girl with her own secrets. That's where I blended truth and imagination – in the Now chapters told from Lisa's point of view. I didn't go to Glenrock Secondary. I wasn't seventeen when my father died. I didn't go through all the teenage dramas that consume Lisa ... mostly why does her father have to go and die, and why tell her this huge sad secret now? I was thirty-seven with a child of my own. Lisa is younger, angrier and more unsure of herself than I was ... but she's me.

My Dad is gone now and soon there won't be any survivors left to say 'I was there, it was real'. Maybe that's why I wrote this book for teens, because in these uncertain times – with COVID and climate change and racism and hate crimes – we're still hurting each other. And maybe, in *Inkflower*, I've created something healing, something kids can take forward into their lives when they encounter someone who's sick, or someone in the schoolyard who's being bullied. A book that lets them hold onto hope and build resilience.

It's been twenty years since my father died. I wrote his story because I felt it needed to be written, and because now more than ever, it needs to be told. Thank-you for sharing it with your students. On this, the 20th anniversary of my father's death, it feels like a beautiful tribute.

Suzy Zail, 2023

# About the Author



Suzy Zail has worked as a litigation lawyer, specialising in Family Law, but now writes full time. Among other titles, she has written *The Tattooed Flower*, a memoir about her father's time as a child survivor of the Holocaust. Her first novel for young adults,

*The Wrong Boy*, was shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year Awards, the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature, the WAYRBA, USBBY and YABBA awards. Her second novel with Walker Books, *Alexander Altmann A10567*, was a Notable Book at the CBCA Awards. Her YA novel, *I Am Change*, is the story of a young Ugandan girl's struggle to stay in school. In 2022 Suzy published her first picture book, *Arabella's Alphabet Adventure*. Suzy's books have been published in Germany, the UK, U.S., Sweden, Italy, Romania and the Netherlands. She lives in Melbourne and has three children. Visit her online at [suzyzail.com.au](http://suzyzail.com.au) and [@suzyzailauthor](https://www.instagram.com/suzyzailauthor).

## About the Note Writer

Michelle Praver has been Head of English and Library in schools and a VCE assessor for English. She has taught in Pathways courses and is currently a teaching focused academic in First Year College at Victoria university working to prepare the next generation of teachers who will in turn inspire their students. Michelle's other passion is the Arts in all its forms but particularly literature. She has written teachers' notes for many YA texts, been the Victorian judge for the Children's Book Council awards and been actively involved in literature festivals interviewing writers and organising events. She has presented at many English teachers conferences, run PD sessions and continues to immerse herself in the world of books.

## Using the book in the classroom

### THEMES/IDEAS

- WWII
- THE HOLOCAUST
- CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
- HISTORY
- ANTISEMITISM
- REFUGEES
- RACISM
- DEATH AND DYING
- FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS
- FRIENDSHIP
- DISABILITY
- LOSS, GRIEF AND RESILIENCE
- STORYTELLING

### CONTENT CONSIDERATIONS

This book explores, among other things, the tragedy of the Holocaust and the murder of 6 million Jews in the Final Solution, a plan designed by the Nazis to make the world 'Judenrein', devoid of Jews. As you take your students on this journey, teachers are encouraged to be cognizant of the distress this exploration may uncover, monitor reactions and respond appropriately. In particular, consider providing support for students who may have had past experiences of trauma. The book also follows Emil's decline as he is diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. The process is slow, and though this time is replete with gratitude and connection, teachers should be mindful about student's feelings regarding Emil's deteriorating condition.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Lisa Keller is sitting in class at Glenrock High School when her mother appears at the classroom door looking uncharacteristically distraught. Until this point, Lisa's life has revolved around friends, social life, sport and her new boyfriend, Adam, but when she slips out of class to chat to her mother, her life changes irrevocably. Mrs Keller whisks her home where her father reveals that he has been diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease and has only months to live. While the family struggles to come to terms with this, Lisa and her brothers are also confronted by Mr Keller's revelation that he is a survivor of Nazi atrocities perpetrated during the Holocaust, including interment in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. Indeed, Keller is not even their real name.

Initially, Lisa struggles to come to terms with this new identity and she resists her father's need to share his story which has become a ritual on Friday nights. As Emil Keller reveals the details of the death of his parents and brother and his own starvation and dehumanisation, Lisa begins to see her father in a new light. While she is afraid to share the news of his illness – and reveal that she's Jewish – she comes to understand the powerful influence of her father's history, which she now feels ready to absorb.

As the weeks pass and her father's illness takes hold, she distances herself from her friends and avoids her boyfriend, causing a rift that further isolates her. Finally, seeing her father's vulnerability and the love and care it invites, Lisa shares her story, realising in the process that being vulnerable takes great strength and that it's okay to be different.

*Inkflower* is told in two different voices using the device of THEN and NOW chapters. Zail skilfully weaves the stories together to reveal the impact of the past on understanding of the world of now. Based on her own experience as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Zail confronts man's inhumanity and the impact of war on future generations, masterfully directing readers to recognise the importance of connection and the power of celebrating difference in shaping a more humane world.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

The protagonist of this book, Lisa, learns that it's important not to “wait until it's too late to get to know your parents” (p.326).

- Design a set of interview questions for your parents/grandparents/elders with the aim of eliciting their childhood, school and young adult experiences. Try to encourage them to recreate moments from their past. Write up your interview using the first person 'I' so that the story reads as an autobiographical account.
- Share some or all of the stories with the class and have them discuss the varied experiences, cultures and lifestyles of the interviewees. Depending on the available time, the teacher could place the stories in a box or folder and draw a few out at random to read aloud. Students listen to the stories and then discuss the varied experiences, cultures, and lifestyles of the interviewees.

The teacher should encourage students to consider the following: How has listening to these stories shaped your understanding of community? What have you learned about diversity? What have you learned about your immediate community? Consider what it means to be an Australian.

Teachers can:

- Visit the Immigration Museum in Melbourne's CBD or take a virtual tour to understand the rich diversity of cultures that has shaped the growth of Australia as a nation.

Then, design a poster to promote Australia as a place of tolerance and rich cultural difference.

- Organise a visit to a Holocaust Museum in your State to learn about pre-war Jewish life in Europe and its decimation at the hands of the Nazis and hear testimony of the remaining survivors. Virtual resources are also detailed in the back of the book.
- Visit the site for Motor Neurone Disease. You can arrange for a speaker to address students. <https://www.mndaustralia.org.au>

**IN-DEPTH TEXT STUDY**

## CHAPTERS 1-3 NOW

Consider the way the author creates Lisa's world of school and its cliques, boyfriends and family life.

- How does Zail let readers know that she is setting her novel in the past? (Consider the music icons she mentions, the fashions she describes and the technology to which she refers). Write a few paragraphs of a story in which you, like Zail, suggest the era by including references to events/fashions/icons of the time. Weave these subtly into your story. Share this with others and allow them to gather the hints and nominate the era and then, suggest improvements.
- Lisa initially responds to the news of her father's illness by focusing on herself. "What if Mum remarries? Will I have to share a room with her new husband's kids? Will I have to change schools?" (p.15). How can you explain this behaviour?
- "How do you comfort someone who's dying? I don't have the words. I never learned them," (p 14). Consider the way modern society prepares us to deal with death. Is it discussed? How do you think we ought to prepare for this inevitability?

## CHAPTER 4 THEN

Chapter 4 begins the eyewitness account of the events that befell Lisa's father during the war years. Emil insists that his family listens to his story and the telling becomes a family ritual as Emil shares his account of the violence and hatred which were meted out to Jews in WW2. Emil recalls that he, "saw things a ten-year old boy shouldn't see," (p.33).

- The impact of childhood trauma is lifelong. In what way might the retelling of his story be a tool of empowerment for Emil?
- Visit the following website and watch some of the survivor videos:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOHPgSehL-M>

How might enabling survivors of trauma to tell their stories, provide a pathway to healing? Consider the way The Uluru Statement of the Heart and The Voice might be tools of empowerment for the Indigenous peoples of Australia?

Emil tells himself that "Knowledge was my way out," (p.31).

- Explain how knowledge can be a tool of empowerment.

As the days pass, Emil is subjected to violence and racism perpetrated by children at his school. He refers to "broken shop windows" and the "burning of books" (p.35).

- Divide the class into small groups to research the events of Kristallnacht and the burning of books on May 10, 1933, in Germany. Students prepare an oral presentation of their findings using slides/PPT to tell the story of these events.
- Debate the topic "That censoring ideas is never OK."

## CHAPTER 5 NOW

"I learned the rules early. Lunch should contain..." (p.54).

Lisa has learned that cultural difference is best kept hidden. Find examples of the way Lisa works hard to avoid standing out. Contrast this with the way the "Vietnamese girl," Mai, behaves in school and the reception she gets from the student body.

- Do you and your friends embrace cultural diversity or is there an expectation of conformity?
- Is Mr Keller wrong in keeping his past hidden for so long? Share your views.

## CHAPTER 6 THEN

- Transporting Jews in cars reserved for cattle was one of the many strategies for dehumanising prisoners. Use the link below to read first-hand accounts of transportation in cattle cars.  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/remembrance/archive/central-theme/deportation-of-the-jews-during-the-holocaust.html>

- Tatte retained his religious observance and his faith, praying regularly. Emil however “prays ... that someone would hear” his father’s prayers (p.67). Discuss the idea that suffering, and trauma are transformative. Use both examples of your family’s experiences and incidents from this book to support your view.

## CHAPTER 7 NOW

- “I’ve lost a grandmother I’ve never met,” (p.73). Brainstorm the ripple effects of war on subsequent generations. Consider issues such as: challenges to identity formation, absent family, inherited trauma, etc. Divide into groups and explore one of these above and share your learning through a short dramatic piece.
- When Emil takes his family to breakfast at the Pancake Parlour, Zail specifically details that “Dad spears a piece of bacon with his fork” (p.76). When Lisa reflects on being brought up with “fairy bread and Tim Tams,” (p.79), she too emphasises her lack of Jewish connection. Why do you think Zail emphasises the lack of family connection to Jewish practice? How is this relevant to Emil’s story?
- Lisa has the opportunity to reach out to the new girl who is struggling to gain acceptance at Glenrock High but chooses rather to “laugh when I’m meant to and ...ask the right questions,” (p.82). Can you understand her behaviour? What do you do to fit in? Are there parts of yourself that you hide from others? Why? To what extent do you shape yourself so that you are accepted by others?

## CHAPTER 8 THEN

- Jewish prisoners were shaved, forced to stand naked, tattooed with numbers, made to wear ill-fitting clothes with an identifying yellow Star of David and even commanded to defecate on demand. What is the psychology behind treating fellow humans in this way? Discuss this with classmates.
- Research your own name. What does it mean? After whom were you named? What influenced your parents to select your given name? Introduce yourself to the class with this

new information. Why is losing your name and becoming a number so significant? Extension Activity: Read *The Wife of Martin Guerre* by Janet Lewis. The main character remains nameless for the entire story. Look at John Proctor’s final speech in *The Crucible* (Act IV) Discuss the power of a name.

- Tatte insists that dignity lives inside the individual. “...they can’t take it because it lives here,” (p.95). Explain the notion that dignity is internal.
- A violin and a flute played while prisoners froze and starved in a Polish winter in a concentration camp. What might have been the motivation behind this added cruelty?
- Tatte continues to pray despite the suffering and deprivation, responding to Emil’s challenge with “It’s all we’ve got,” (p.97). What role do hope and faith play in survival? What role do dreams and memories play (p.99-100) in maintaining hope? Use your own experiences or those of your family to respond to this question.
- Emil reflects that there are things he had to learn and things he had to unlearn. Make a list of these. What do we learn from this list?
- Tatte is pinned with his arm behind his back and a gun at his head, under the sign “Arbeit Macht Frei”. Research the phrase. Explain the term irony.

## CHAPTER 9 NOW

- Lisa is aware that words can be “...too small for what my father went through.” (p.103) Are there times where you have found words inadequate? Consider the role of music in articulating feelings. Could you argue that music can be more powerful than words? Use the link below to examine the role of music in Jewish life in the ghetto and the role of music as a vehicle for articulating both hope and suffering. Create a piece of music that tells a story. You can do this using digital tools if you cannot play an instrument.  
<https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/music/music-in-the-holocaust.asp>

- Emil explains the flower tattooed on his arm. “Something beautiful to cover up the ugliness” (p.105). In what way does this decision reflect the personality of Emil?
- Lisa regrets the number of missed opportunities in never having asked her father about his experiences. Should children push their parents to reveal trauma? Do they have a right to know? Is it selfish or an important obligation to share?

## CHAPTER 10 THEN

- A woman neither SS nor Kapo illegally provides Emil with some scraps of extra food. “You’re too small, the smallest boy here, you should eat,” she whispered. Small acts of defiance saved some Jewish lives and demonstrated that humanity cannot be totally wiped out. “Her kindness let me believe there was still goodness in people,” (p.125). Research the concept of ‘Righteous Gentiles’ and the way they have been honoured in the State of Israel. Organise a Night of the Notables experience to celebrate some of these heroes of our history. **Night of the Notables is an evening in which students, having researched a key figure in history, can stand in their shoes. They prepare a speech in the role of that character and dress and perform as that character. Visitors wander around the ‘live’ exhibition.** <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/famous-righteous-gentiles>
- Explain what Emil meant by the phrase, “The best revenge was to stay alive” (p.130).
- Emil marvels that the violent Kapo, Janek, is someone’s father. “I couldn’t imagine him warming a little boy’s cold hands in his pockets or teaching him right from wrong,” (p. 131). How can we understand man’s inhumanity to man? How might dehumanising your victim enable inhumanity? How can we minimise this behaviour?

## CHAPTER 11 NOW

- As MND takes hold of Emil, he loses his ability to do simple things. How does he manage to maintain his dignity and hope? Consider his response, “Celebrate today,” (p. 138) when answering this question.

- Explain what motivates Lisa’s refusal to share with her friends both her father’s illness and her discovery of his tragic past. What would you do?
- Explain the way in which experiences learned from Tatte, Willie and Emil, provide Lisa with lessons that assist her in navigating her father’s diagnosis. What does she learn?

## CHAPTER 12 THEN

- “We weren’t told why we had to leave or where we were going,” (p.151). What is achieved by keeping prisoners ignorant?
- Willie and Emil are forced to go on a Death March. Use the links below to research the many death marches across Europe. Transform the classroom into an exhibition space based on the collective research of the class. Begin with the links provided.  
<https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/exhibition/death-marches-evidence-and-memory>  
<https://listverse.com/2016/09/14/10-chilling-accounts-from-survivors-of-world-war-ii-death-marches>

## CHAPTER 13 NOW

- Despite Lisa’s growing understanding of racism and bigotry, she allows the Vietnamese girl, Mai, to eat alone rather than inviting her to join their circle and take the empty chair (p.168). Why do you think Lisa is unable to put her learning about prejudice and stereotyping into practice?

## CHAPTER 14 THEN

- The Nazis were determined to establish an Aryan race of pure breeds. Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and others were not considered worthy of life. Use the link provided to research Nazi racial beliefs. Then research the racial profiling of Aboriginal Australians. Present your findings to a partner. What parallels can you see?  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zp3p82p/revision/7>
- Read the liberation stories below from survivors of Buchenwald concentration camp who made their way to Australia after the war.



<https://www.monash.edu/buchenwald-boys/melbourne/australia-prepares>

<https://www.monash.edu/buchenwald-boys/liberation>

#### CHAPTER 15 NOW

- Consider the way in which shared suffering acts as a bond. Explain why this might be the case.
- Lisa blames her father for her own inability to communicate with Deb and Adam. “You taught me to build walls,” (p.190). Is there truth in this idea? Discuss.
- As Emil’s MND worsens, Lisa comments, “that there are no pills for our pain,” (p.199). Use this quote as the title for a creative story where pain is used as a metaphor for any form of suffering.
- Despite his growing weakness, Emil remains positive. Use the ideas in this chapter to articulate Emil’s philosophy of life. What is your philosophy of life? Write this into a few paragraphs and share this with a partner
- Emil is reaffirming his cultural heritage as he faces his own demise. Do you believe that it is important to maintain your cultural heritage? Why/why not?

#### CHAPTER 16 THEN

- “The soldiers stared at us. Some of them looked frightened. Mostly they looked sad.” (p.204). “I saw a reporter throw up outside the latrines and a man in a three piece suit escape to a waiting car.” (p.215). Read an account from the liberating army of American soldiers in order to understand the sight which they beheld on first seeing the privation.  
<https://www.auschwitz.org/en/liberation-of-kl-auschwitz75/witnesses-accounts75/>
- Willie dies having been shot into a pit prepared by Nazis who were trying to cover their tracks by ‘destroying evidence’. Use the link below to research the infamous massacre of Babi Yar.  
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kiev-and-babi-yar>

Write an obituary for world Jewry, an ode to the 6 million Jews who perished at the hands of Nazi murderers.

#### CHAPTER 17 NOW - CHAPTER 20 NOW

- “All I can do is give him back his past and tell him it’s important, and that I’ve been listening.” (p.220). What does Lisa mean by “give him back his past?” How does remembering assist those who suffered? Consider the phrase ‘Lest we Forget’ which is part of our Anzac Day ritual. Explain what it means in light of your reading of this book.
- International Holocaust Remembrance Day is January 27. Organise a school assembly to mark this day. Consider what you will include and what story you will be telling regarding tolerance and acceptance.
- Upon hearing that Lisa is Jewish, Deb says, “What does Jewish look like?” (p.224). What does this quote tell the reader about Deb?
- Mai, the Vietnamese girl in Lisa’s class, has both been reading about bigotry and loneliness and experiencing bigotry and loneliness which she shares willingly with the girls. Lisa says that “Letting go is hard,” (p.223) and Emil argues that “Letting others in, ...[is] not dangerous-it’s freeing,” (p.230). What is Zail saying here about the power of communication, sharing and storytelling? Do you agree?
- Remembering the miracle of freedom, Emil is thrilled that “People called me by my name,” (p.231). Consider again the way your name defines you.
- After the war, Emil and some others seek revenge through both minor and major acts of violence (see pp.233-234). Can revenge be justified? Emil says of his own family, “You are my revenge,” (p.245) and “I wanted to finish school and reclaim the life Hitler stole from me. That would be my revenge.” (p.258) Explain these ideas.

- Investigate the countries that gave refuge to fleeing Nazis. Are these countries morally culpable for providing refuge? Argue your case. Use this site as a starting point for your investigation.  
<https://www.sbs.com.au/guide/article/2019/03/02/south-american-reich-where-nazis-went-after-war>
- Emil's family home and shop and even his cow are now in the possession of strangers. Much Jewish property, artwork and even bank accounts were simply taken over by strangers. What do you think should be done about this? Does the phrase 'let sleeping dogs lie' have a place here? Write a persuasive piece, arguing your view.  
<https://www.archives.gov/research/holocaust/articles-and-papers/turning-history-into-justice.html>
- Emil returns to his hometown and eventually to his surviving siblings only to hear conversations like, "Hitler didn't keep his promise. There's more of them now than before," (p.240) and "You're a Jew and sooner or later they'll come for you. There's talk of shutting down synagogues. That's how it starts..." (p.262). Consider this in light of the phrase: 'If you watch closely, history does nothing but repeat itself.'
- Research the incidences of Antisemitism in Australia. <https://www.antidefamation.com.au/click-against-hate/> What, in your view, can be done about antisemitism and other racial intolerance? As a class, design a school campaign to stop baseless hatred. Consider making posters, a short trailer, an education strategy, etc

## CHAPTER 21-26

- Explain what Lisa means when she says, "I have been shaped by the stories my father did and didn't tell me." (p.276).
- As Lisa contemplates her father's imminent death, she contemplates beauty. "I stare at the tree. By the time Dad comes home, it will have lost its flowers. Maybe that's what makes its beauty so powerful; the fact that it will soon disappear. Maybe knowing that death is around the corner makes the last months more beautiful," (p.275). How does mindfulness serve to enrich our lives? In what way does the prospect of death make us more mindful?
- Lisa sits in silence to try and understand her father's perspective. "This is dad's life-sitting with his hands tied behind his back and his mouth taped shut. This is what life's like for him; what it was like when he was fourteen, in the cattle train and at roll call, in the mines and the barrack," (p.278). Being a prisoner and having your voice silenced undermines your sense of self but Lisa understands that "the past won't be silenced and neither will Dad," (p.280). How does Emil maintain his sense of self despite his illness-induced silence?
- Lisa eventually tires of caring about what others think (p.287). She comments that "it must be liberating not seeing yourself through other people's eyes," (p.287). How is this a liberation? And how does this new-found liberation empower Lisa? Find examples from the book.
- Emil does not believe in God (p.301) and yet it is important for him to attend synagogue and sit amongst his people. Can you explain this?
- Lisa explains the reasons she distanced from all her friends. "I'm sorry for not trusting you enough to tell you about Dad," (p. 309). "I need him to know that, to see all the broken bits of me, and still choose to stay," (p.312). Explain the role of trust in relationships?

## CHAPTERS 27-33

- Lisa reflects that, "Sometimes we keep secrets from the people we love because we want to protect them," (p.325). How might keeping secrets both protect and undermine family dynamics?
- Lisa learns that "Everyone has stories they're afraid to tell," (p.328). What are the stories in your life or that of your family that you struggle to share. Why? How might telling these stories threaten or comfort? Why did Emil choose not to tell his story for so long? Use the text to provide evidence for your response.

- Lisa considers her loss of “grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts to the Holocaust,” (p.338). She decides that perhaps “words are my way back,” (p.338). Emil says that “Everyone has a story,” (p.347). How can we use words to ensure this sort of suffering does not recur? What steps will you take?  
Extension activity: Read the story ‘The Sniper’ by Liam O’Flaherty. Use your own words to write a story about baseless hatred.
- Write a chapter of your family’s story. Choose a starting point and explore ONE element which sheds light on who YOU are. Illustrate the story (digitally, in sculpture, craft, etc) and create a class exhibition. Invite parents and friends to take a gallery walk around your exhibition.
- One of Lisa’s final exchanges with her father is when she thanks him. Emil asks, “For what?” Lisa responds, “For opening my eyes... You know you used to hoist me on your shoulders so I could see across the park to the rest of the world...I can see further now” (p.339). Explain the metaphor. What has Lisa learned from her father and from this journey?
- Emil types that he is “...a lucky man,” (p.340). Other Holocaust titles also reflect luck and hope. Consider, ‘There Will be Tomorrow’ by Guta Goldstein, ‘The Happiest man on Earth’ by Eddie Jaku. Why do you suppose many survivors frame their experiences in this way?
- Lisa understands the power of storytelling and promises her father to “to tell people [his] story,” (p.355) In the Afterword, Zail explains that ‘Inkflower’ is based on the biographical story of her father and that “I promised him that I’d use his past to rewrite the future. I told him I’d pass on his warning that we mustn’t forget, and that difference should be celebrated,” (p.371). What is the message/s you take away from this novel? Do you think that the author has succeeded in passing on her father’s message?
- Pretend to be the publisher, Walker Books, and design a flyer or a YouTube advertisement for this book. The author, Suzy Zail, would love to see any flyers and advertisements your students produce! They can be sent to her via her website [www.suzyzail.com.au](http://www.suzyzail.com.au)

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEXT

Time has been manipulated using the format of THEN/NOW. Do you consider this an effective storytelling tool? Why or why not? Consider the way in which the strategy enhances tension, builds interest and deals with the notion of the past as a tool for shaping who we are and who we become. Had Zail chosen to tell this story as an integrated narrative, what would have been lost?

All of the Now sections are told using Lisa’s voice while the Then parts are narrated by Lisa’s father, Emil. Has Zail succeeded in convincing you that each voice is genuine? Find examples to substantiate your claim.

Try your hand at writing a story using two voices which present two tales that ultimately intertwine. How does Zail make the transition from Emil’s voice to Emil’s voice-generated accounts? Is this a successful technique?

This story is based on real events. Zail is re-telling her father’s experience. What might be the challenges for a writer mining someone else’s story?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

**WRITE:** The teacher should bring some old black and white photos of individuals. Photos should be laid out on tables and students should be invited to select one and then directed to write an imagined family history for the chosen family or individual. To blend in with the theme of the book, the teacher could specify that the photos depict individuals from the same city as Emil. (The website of the Holocaust Centre of Israel, Yad Vashem, has a photo archive accessible online at <https://photos.yadvashem.org/>)

**DEBATE:** ‘That one should always follow orders.’ What do we learn about the power of indoctrination?

This raises the question of independent thinking versus the imperative to obey the laws of the land. Teachers guide a discussion about the challenges of standing up to authority. When is this acceptable and when not?

**READ:** Read *The Sunflower* by Simon Wiesenthal. Consider the moral dilemma in this book. Is forgiveness always possible? Are there times when forgiveness is immoral? Debate this in your class. *The Sunflower* recounts an experience with a mortally wounded Nazi who begs forgiveness from one inmate. The book's second half provides a symposium of responses to the question of forgiveness.

**WATCH:** Watch *The Wave*. Set in an American high school, this movie explores the story of a teacher who wants his students to understand the power of propaganda and how Hitler was able to turn an entire nation against the Jews. Consider the power of indoctrination as you discuss this movie.

**DISCUSS:** Review information from the Human Rights Commission on the 'It stops with me' campaign regarding bystander action.  
<https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/take-action/bystander-action>

How realistic is it to ask people to speak up and call out poor behaviour such as racism? What can make this a hard thing to do? What can you do?

**LISTEN:** Contact Courage to Care for a free incursion about being an Upstander.  
<https://couragetocare.org.au/upstander-programs/syp/>

## Also by Suzy Zail

